

Boak, George (2023) Developing ideas and stories about action learning. *Action Learning : Research and Practice*, 20 (3). pp. 201-202.

Downloaded from: <https://ray.yorks.ac.uk/id/eprint/8831/>

The version presented here may differ from the published version or version of record. If you intend to cite from the work you are advised to consult the publisher's version:

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14767333.2023.2264030>

Research at York St John (RaY) is an institutional repository. It supports the principles of open access by making the research outputs of the University available in digital form. Copyright of the items stored in RaY reside with the authors and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full text items free of charge, and may download a copy for private study or non-commercial research. For further reuse terms, see licence terms governing individual outputs. [Institutional Repositories Policy Statement](#)

RaY

Research at the University of York St John

For more information please contact RaY at
ray@yorks.ac.uk

Developing ideas and stories about action learning

Editorial: *Action Learning Research and Practice* Vol 20 Issue 3 November 2023

Good theories and sound ideas take time to develop. The crafting of academic papers and the development of the theories they put forward is often an iterative process, with one draft succeeding another, and this is as true concerning the development of ideas and stories about action learning as it is of any other field of theory and practice. One useful stage in the life cycle of a paper published in a journal is its appearance, often in a less mature form, as a conference paper. The writers concentrate on how to identify the key points of their research and how best to convey them in the paper and in the short, time-bound presentation to conference delegates. The reactions of those delegates, and the reflections that arise from the whole experience, often lead the writers to make changes, large or small, to the paper. In the best cases, the experience leads to valuable development that strengthens the paper, sharpens its focus, builds a stronger analysis and creates more useful conclusions.

Three of the refereed papers in this issue of the journal aroused interest with their appearance at the International Action Learning Conference in April of this year. At that time, they were in perhaps more adolescent form, in need of more coordination, more filling out, more confidence, but were of obvious potential. It is a great pleasure to see them in this issue of the journal, now grown more fully into their earlier promise. (Full disclosure: I am a contributor to one of these papers.) As well as through the conference, they have all also been shaped by the iterative process of review and revision and, as always, we are grateful for the invaluable but unpaid work of our constructive reviewers, for the questions they raise and the positive suggestions they make as to how a paper might be improved. Developing useful ideas and interesting stories about action learning requires dialogue – usually not only between multiple authors, but also between authors and reviewers and conference delegates and other readers of early drafts. Given the social nature of the practice of action learning, it is particularly appropriate that this should be the case for papers about it.

The paper by Paquet and colleagues presents the key findings from action research on the development of work self-efficacy in a large-scale Canadian Codevelopment Action Learning (CAL) programme. Quantitative analysis showed a significant improvement in work self-efficacy, with regard to teamwork, problem solving, and work politics. The research also identified 10 broad facilitation behaviours that could impact improvements in work self-efficacy. This paper builds on a paper by Paquet and colleagues on CAL published in this journal in 2022 (*Action Learning: Research and Practice*, 19.1).

Finnestrand and colleagues provide a case study of the use of action learning in a large Norwegian public sector organisation. In this case, a programme was designed that combined action learning with the use of critical incident technique to investigate recent practices of project management in the organisation. Examples of effective and ineffective practices were both chosen for investigation. The original aim of the programme was to provide training and development for newly-appointed engineers, but as it progressed it was evident that it provided learning more widely throughout the organisation, including for senior managers.

Edmonstone and Cialfi note that action learning first developed in societies imbued with Western values, but that it is now an international phenomenon, used in at least seventy member states of the United Nations. They consider action learning in different cultural contexts and argue that the Western set of values may not necessarily fit well with the local cultures within which it is practised.

They draw on a selection of the literature to date on this issue to offer some practical rules of thumb for using action learning in different cultural contexts.

Cho and colleagues conducted a systematic literature review of papers published in this journal 2004-2023, using the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations as an analytical framework to examine published research on action learning for community development and to provide implications for research and practice. The review identified 85 relevant papers. The SDGs focus on wicked social problems, such as poverty, hunger, health and well-being, gender equality, and climate action. Papers included in the review perceived action learning as an important approach to addressing such problems.

George Boak

York St John University, York, UK

g.boak@yorks.ac.uk